GRIDLER

Lincoln

LINCOLN: A TYPICAL AMERICAN

AN ADDRESS BY

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To Hon H.C. Lodge
with cordial regards of
Thos. B. Reed

LINCOLN: THE TYPICAL AMERICAN.

I confess to no little trepidation in rising to address this company on the ninety-second anniversary of the birth of the lamented Abraham Lincoln, sixteenth President of the United States. Certainly the theme is sufficiently inspiring, but when he was at the zenith of his fame—and he was that when he was murdered—I was a mere schoolboy and naturally less interested in the political history of our country than I am to-day.

I can not hope to say much that is interesting or anything that is new or that will materially enhance the name and fame of that great man. All this has been said years ago—said by abler men in their own novel and inimitable way. The official record proclaims it; history records it. There is, therefore, little concerning Lincoln that the world does not know and nothing that it does not justly admire. A few thoughts, however, suggest themselves; and, if your patience will bear the strain, I will endeavor to give expression to them.

It is not my province to even briefly review the life of Lincoln. That would be a useless task, quite out of keeping on such an occasion, since

these details are well known to you as to all patriotic Americans. Indeed, save Washington alone, the world at large (to which Lincoln belonged in its broadest sense) is more familiar with his life, his character, and his career than with those of any other American who ever lived.

Lincoln was a product peculiarly indigenous to our soil; yet a specimen most rare, for Nature, even in the abundance of her power, is far too stingy in presenting reproductions of the like of that remarkable man. Perhaps, in the fullness of her wisdom, she prefers to let him, like the solitary diamond, large and resplendent, shine with unique effulgence in the galaxy of Presidents as the beacon to which his countrymen can point, justly proclaiming him as the savior of our common country—the preserver of the glorious heritage Washington won for us. Lincoln was molded and fashioned by Nature out of her own plan. He was unlike any other. He seemed destined by the hand that created him for the time in which he lived and for the brief period wherein he largely held, and was responsible for, the destinies of our country. The world, too, is better because he lived in it; he was a part of the mass of humanity by birth, by nature, by instinct. He belonged to that great majority—the "plain people"—from whom he sprang. He made their cause his cause; he knew their instincts; their char-

acteristics; he intuitively felt their pulse, their heart throbs. In the hour of his supremest glory and greatest triumphs he never ceased to kindly remember them; never tired of doing their bidding; never forgot their wants. Their condition constantly appealed to him. The impression left upon civilization everywhere by this great man, whose nobility of character and wealth of goodness will live while language is spoken, is as precious, as fadeless, as bright, and as honorable as anything in the history or annals of any land or any time. It will always remain so. He had no superior; no equal.

Lincoln was a simple man, easy of access and a student of the people, whom he knew so well. In this respect his foresight seemed almost superhuman. He was courageous and heroic, fearing nothing except wrong. He was a man of immense energy; of great tenacity of purpose; yet gentle, kind, and lovable. He was genuine; he was true. He had the ring of sincerity. He was an orator, profound and logical; he was gifted with the art of story-telling, although many of the anecdotes attributed to him may never have had the slightest authenticity; yet those he really narrated were told with a charming grace and a well-defined purpose, but never to inflict pain or injury, of both of which he was incapable, if it could be avoided. He was resolute, yet merciful and forbearing.

Lincoln was wholly without scholastic training; notwithstanding this, he was master of the art of composition, and his style was pure, terse, and forceful. His second inaugural address stands without doubt as one of the greatest of his papers, but there are many others of wondrous beauty and grandeur. He was a student ever—a ceaseless gleaner after knowledge and truth.

Lincoln was a man of many sides—noble, grand, lovable, ingenuous, yet shrewd; a solitary in his genius, but companionable; a lover of his fellowmen. His heart was one of tenderness; his sympathies easily touched; he never saw a fellow-creature suffer without feeling the pangs himself. It was his nature. He was suddenly raised to the highest place of power within the gift of his fellow-citizens, but he never swerved from his duty under the most trying circumstance, nor did he ever cease to be just, generous, and humane. He did not know how to be otherwise. How true and how beautiful are the words of Robert G. Ingersoll—a past master of poetic thought:

> Nothing discloses real character like the use of power. It is easy for the weak to be gentle. Most people can bear adversity. But if you wish to know what a man really is, give him power. That is the supreme test. It is the glory of Lincoln that, having almost absolute power, he never abused it, except upon the side of mercy.

Usually, in considering the life of Lincoln, we dwell almost exclusively upon his wonderful services to the country in the purely domestic phases of the struggle for the Union. His figure stands out above all else in its relation to the course of events here at home during that trying and unhappy period. We naturally think of him as the guiding hand of the great forces which he marshaled and set in motion and patiently reinforced and stimulated in the darkest hours. But it is not only as the calm, unflinching pilot in the storm that swept over our land that he was great. As one whose attention has been given for many years to the foreign affairs of our Government, I have been impressed by a feature of his career as President which is not so often made prominent in eulogies of him. The perils which he had to face in the military strength of the South, with political disaffection in his rear, are, of course, the most obvious and the most dramatic; but there were foes without, with whom, at times, it was even more difficult to deal. All the world knows now, what was more or less secret history at the time, that powerful influences were at work in Europe to aid the seceding States, and that it was due to him that they were frustrated. I am far from wishing to detract from the consummate ability of his Secretary of State, Seward, who, in my judgment, has never received the full measure of

credit due him; but, invaluable as his assistance was to Lincoln, there can be no doubt that at some of the most critical stages of our diplomacy it was the President's sound judgment and tact that averted the storm or smoothed the angry waters for the ship of state. It was his master hand that guided the rudder and steered the course clear of the breakers, frequently threatening, dark, and gloomy.

The skill with which Lincoln handled the foreign relations of the United States during this critical period, with the aid of Seward, is, in fact, one of the most remarkable illustrations of his genius, and it has a larger significance as showing the natural versatility of a typical American. Lincoln was, before all else, a specimen of that numerous class—a potent element of our national life—the self-made American. He was, as I have said, something more than a type; he stands alone, confident in his own strength, firm and unyielding in the right. Born to command, for he possessed a perfect knowledge of himself and a capacity to understand and control those with whom he was surrounded, he plodded on, in his own way, to a successful end. Patience, firmness, and heroism—a constellation of strength which adorns great minds—were his distinguishing traits.

But, as you are all aware, Lincoln had very few opportunities of education, of culture, and knew

but little of the machinery, the proprieties, the etiquette of diplomatic intercourse. Nevertheless, when he was called upon to deal with delicate questions of international comity, he proved himself fully equal to the emergency. He is perhaps the most conspicuous of all the examples in our history of the efficiency of common sense in even what may be termed the polite profession of diplomacy. It is too much the fashion to insist upon superficial accomplishments on the part of our statesmen, and especially of our representatives abroad in dealing with foreign nations. I would not, for one moment, belittle the importance of culture and refinement and special qualifications for officers of the Government who have delicate duties to discharge, or who are called upon to support the national dignity in foreign lands; but these duties, after all—if I may be pardoned the expression—are but the millinery of official life. It seems to me to be far more important that those who transact business for the Government, either at home or abroad, should possess the practical qualities, the shrewd insight into human character which is gained only by actual, everyday contact with men, the ready adaptability to new conditions which Lincoln showed in his alert and facile Americanism. These qualities were not peculiar to him, but are so common among our countrymen that it is the rule, rather than the

exception, that men who have risen to such influence among us that they are chosen for important posts exhibit a capacity which is often, no doubt, surprising to themselves. It certainly excites the astonishment of foreigners; and the very novelty of our methods in diplomacy, the directness and promptitude with which we go to the root of matters, often give us a distinct advantage. If we look back upon the diplomatic history of the United States, I think it will be found that we have made but few serious errors and none that were capital.

We have now entered upon a wholly new relation to the rest of the world. The old days of isolation ended even before the Spanish war demonstrated to the world the fact that we were capable of taking a place among the great powers; they had ended because we had begun to invade the markets of the world with our goods—surely a peaceable and laudable undertaking. At first, we hardly looked upon it as a serious business. It originated in the need of our manufacturers to get rid of their surplus product. The industrial system of the United States had developed to the point where its productive capacity largely exceeded the demands of the home market. Instinctively, we sought new markets abroad. The movement has gone on with results that have surprised ourselves and amazed the world. It might be supposed that to claim preeminence

among the nations competing in commerce was a mere exaggeration, or, at best, a wish that was father to the thought, if it were based upon our own estimate of our achievements; but the general testimony of the very nations who are feeling our competition most keenly concedes to us a position of eminence in the world's markets which, to quote from a recent letter of the Secretary of State—

> May result in shifting the center, not only of industrial, but of commercial, activity and the money power of the world to our marts.

I cite this great fact, the most surprising, perhaps, in the economic history of the world in recent days, because it brings to a focus, as it were, the qualities (which I believe to be peculiar to Americans) that made Lincoln at once so great a man and so genuine a representative of the great mass of his countrymen. And pursuing the subject further, we find strong confirmation of my theory in two widely dissimilar forms of activity—I refer to private enterprise and official service. Usually, as was remarked recently by the Secretary of the Navy, official service follows in the wake of private enterprise; but in the commercial expansion of the United States we find that the two have gone together hand in hand, and that official service, far from treading tamely in the rear, has in many

instances blazed the way for our industries and trade. Upon the one hand, American manufacturers have shown surprising capacity to adapt themselves to the requirements of foreign markets and actually to undersell the most advanced industries of Europe in their own homes. A striking illustration of this is found in the fact that we are selling cutlery in Sheffield; tin plate in Wales; boots, shoes, and hosiery in Leicester; and the shipment of American coal to England may actually be said to be "carrying coals to Newcastle." Upon the other hand, I do not hesitate to assert that the success of our exporters in thus invading markets that might have been considered hermetically sealed has been largely due to the activity of our consular officers and the rapidity with which their reports are printed and distributed. You have all, doubtless, heard a good deal about the defects of our consular system. That there is room for improvement, none can deny; but the consular officers, drawn from the great body of the people, have shown themselves to be so intelligent in comprehending the needs of American trade and so zealous in promoting it that our service, defective though it may be, has excited the admiration and the envy of great trading nations like England and Germany, whose consular corps for years have been held up to us as models for our

own. All this serves, to my mind, to emphasize the practical superiority of the national type which we have unconsciously evolved, and to cast an even stronger and more vivid light upon the national characteristics of which Lincoln was so great an exponent. Aside from his individual qualities of mind, of heart, of character, he stands to-day, as he was in life, in the fullest sense a heroic figure of Americanism—the Americanism which we now see rapidly spreading itself over the face of the earth, to the envy of the world.

I make no pretense at propheey; the plain, practical things of life appeal to me, little of the sentimental and none of the theoretical. Yet I venture this conjecture: that if, in God's providence, Lincoln were alive, he would unquestionably be on the side of the greater United States—not greater strictly in the sense of its material wealth and physical power, but in the higher and nobler sense of its wide and widening influence as a controlling power among the nations and peoples of the earth, of which, I think, we are the greatest to-day. And I confidently believe that Lincoln's commanding influence would be on the side of the great majority in the movement for the advancement of the power and the glory of our country at home and abroad, since he is everywhere recognized, with universal accord, as "one of the greatest Americans and best of men."

In closing, since Lincoln blossomed and broadened under the trying days of 1861–65, what more beautiful sentiment can I employ than to quote the poetic Ingersoll again?

> Lincoln was the grandest figure of the fiercest civil war. He is the gentlest memory of our world.